



Metaphor and Mills. Figurative Language in Business and Economics

Honesto Herrera-Soler, Michael White (eds).

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In a recent book entitled *The Poetry of Thought*, George Steiner (2011: 7) emphasizes the impossibility of separating or dissociating philosophical thinking from the actual language in which it is expressed. A quotation from the troubled philosopher Louis Althusser expresses, at the beginning of the book, this idea in the best way possible: “On ne pense en Philosophie que sous des métaphores” [In philosophy one thinks only metaphorically]. Paraphrasing this idea, it can be said that *Metaphor and Mills. Figurative Language in Business and Economics* (*M&M* henceforth) is the most recent and also the most exceptional endorsement available in the academia to the idea that both economics and business have indeed been shaped by the wealth of metaphors used.

Economists have long been aware of the prominent role that metaphor has played in the shaping of their ideas. The best known figure in this field has obviously been that of Deirdre McCloskey, and her personal and academic journey from a male Economics professor at the University of Iowa to a female Professor of Economics, History, English, and Communication at the University of Illinois at Chicago is the best illustration of how the field has evolved from neoclassical thinking into a rhetorical awareness that is dear to the humanities. But McCloskey with her now classic books (1985, 1990 & 1994) is not a unique example and is indeed part of an ever increasing group of economists who are only too aware of the workings of metaphor in their field. To mention but a few, we have Henderson, Mirowski, Klammer, Backhouse but we could also include in the list other people from what is called mainstream economics and who have even mentioned metaphor in the chapters devoted to methodology in their handbooks (for instance, Samuelson & Nordhaus, 2005).

Applied linguists have also been interested in the metaphors used in these fields, but, as expected, the perspective adopted is somewhat different in outlook and methodology, even though not totally separated from that of

economists. It is relevant to evoke here the days, in the 1980's, of the school of Birmingham, where a group of scholars – Dudley-Evans, Henderson, Tadros, Mason, among others – busied themselves with a linguistic description of economic language. That description, as could not be otherwise, included the use of metaphor as a characteristic trait, which in a brilliant synthesis was labelled by Mason (1990) as “dancing on air”.

M&M incorporates both traditions and is indeed an editorial event because not only is it published by a prestigious publisher in the field, as indeed Mouton de Gruyter is, but also because it has managed to gather in one book an ensemble of the most notable researchers who have something to say in the field of metaphorical thinking in economics and business. Its editors, Honesto Herrera-Soler and Michael White, two experienced researchers in the field with numerous publications and papers on economic metaphor themselves, were in an exceptional position to compile the most complete volume on the subject so far. They have been able to strike a balance, which I find one of the bonuses of the books, between experts in different areas. Especially important in this respect is the effort they have made to assemble scholars from different geographical and academic backgrounds, which include researchers from Taiwan, the United States, Brazil, Denmark, the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain.

The structure of the volume is sound and well conceived and the different sections succeed in giving the reader a thorough account of the presence of metaphor at all possible levels. In this sense, it is only fair to say that the structure and richness of *M&M* faithfully reflects one of the main aims of the editors when they say in the introduction “[w]e take brief of Economics in its most inclusive sense, covering the academic discipline and the slice of reality ‘out there in the world’ and the same goes for Business” (page 2). Later in the book, Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli confirms this view when she talks about both the “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” objectives of Business courses (page 205) and establishes later a link between the fields of economics and business as they “converge to form the foundation of *business studies* degree programmes” (page 206).

In my view, this broad approach is more evident if we look at the variety of perspectives and viewpoints that the different contributors to the book adopt. These different perspectives do not simply refer to actual disciplinary fields in which metaphors have been identified, which as we have seen combine “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” elements, ranging from Politics (BERBER

SARDINHA's chapter), to Economics (MOUTON; RESCHE), Business (CRAWFORD CAMICIOTTOLI), Management (LITTLEMORE; SKORCZYNSKA) or Accounting (FUERTES-OLIVERA & VELASCO-SACRISTÁN), to give but some examples. More importantly, the word approach here refers to the actual outlook and methodology from which the analysis of metaphor is carried out.

One would expect that the editors, being two scholars whose work has mainly been developed within the boundaries of Cognitive Linguistics, would exclude other approaches to metaphor. However, not only is this not the case, but the book includes scholars from other persuasions, with a richly varied disciplinary background. Thus, although authors whose articles are mostly cognitive linguistic in outlook (LITTLEMORE; SKORCZYNSKA; SIANG-FONG CHUNG, for example), there are also scholars using other perspectives such as: philological analysis (TEJADA CALLER & GUZMÁN GUERRA), discourse analysis (BERBER SARDINHA; HOLMGREEN), terminology (FUERTES-OLIVERA & VELASCO-SACRISTÁN), corpus analysis (CRAWFORD CAMICIOTTOLI), rhetoric (EUBANKS), English for Specific Purposes (RESCHE), economic thinking (MOUTON).

There are chapters in the book that offer really interesting views of what I consider key aspects of economic metaphors. This is the case, for example, of the articles by JEANNETTE LITTLEMORE, PHILIP EUBANKS, HANNA SKORCZYNSKA, and HANNA BLAZKOVA which in my view respectively touch on some of the key elements of current research: a) multimodality, b) pragmatics, c) levels of specialisation in metaphor use and d) metaphor and genre. In the first of these articles, we can see how an analysis of metaphoric gestures can also be applied to specialised discourse. The results, though preliminary, show how the presence of a non-native speaker seems to be critical in the election of metaphorical gestures by the lecturer. In the second, Eubanks analyses how a very prominent metaphor such as “the perfect storm” has failed to be productive and what are the reasons explaining it. SKORCZYNSKA deals with “theory constructive” metaphors in a very specialised corpus and compares their use to other metaphors in a more general corpus of the same area of specialisation. Finally, BLAZKOVA explains how the use of metaphor in a specific genre, Business Development Network speeches, helps create group identity.

Finally, the remaining articles elaborate on such interesting topics as metaphor translation (FUERTES-OLIVERA & VELASCO-SACRISTÁN; CHUNG),

metaphor evolution (TEJADA CALLER & GUZMÁN GUERRA), metaphor and discourse (BERBER SARDINHA; CRAWFORD CAMICIOTTOLI; HOLMGREEN), teaching metaphor for ESP students (RESCHE). What is more interesting, they elaborate on their subjects from a wide gamut of methodological perspectives ranging from the psycholinguistic experiment or corpus analysis to the analysis of specific cases or the philological study of certain metaphors.

All in all, *M&M* is an excellent volume that will bring up to date both the general reader and the specialist aiming to delve deeper into the never ending realms of metaphor use in business and economics. The depth and variety of perspectives make this book a must-read for anyone interested in gaining an all-encompassing perspective.

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